

Realities A' Shiftin'

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/43417710) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/43417710>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	The Walking Dead (TV)
Relationships:	Daryl Dixon/Beth Greene , Daryl Dixon & Beth Greene
Characters:	Beth Greene (Walking Dead) , Daryl Dixon , Maggie Greene , Original Dixon Character(s) , Snakes (Characters)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe , Alternate Universe - Soulmates , Alternate Universe - Fantasy , Fantasy , High Fantasy , Supernatural Elements , Witches , Original Universe , Multiverse , Alternate Reality , First Time Shifting , Slow Burn , Some Plot , Plot Twists , Explicit Sexual Content , Explicit Language , Humor , Attempt at Humor , Some Humor , Sassy , Masturbation , Fucking , Sex , Vaginal Sex , Semi-Public Sex , Rough Sex , Light Angst , Angst with a Happy Ending , Fluff and Angst , Angst and Feels , Angst and Fluff and Smut , Angst and Humor , Comfort/Angst , Angst and Romance , Angst and Porn , Cunnilingus , Oral Sex
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2022-12-04 Completed: 2022-12-06 Words: 9,747 Chapters: 5/5

Realities A' Shiftin'

by [LeighJ](#)

Summary

"You're the most beat up cat I've ever seen," Beth declares to the half dead, feral thing curled up on her porch swing.

The filthy, battered cat lifts its head from its paw and meows like it agrees. She sighs, at a loss. She moved into her cottage six months ago and the cat has been here from the day she unloaded her boxes. No one in the small community seems to have any idea where its come from, and her Werewolf neighbour Rick can only attest that the cats a male.

Beth's new cat has some reality shattering secrets for her to uncover.

Notes

It is technically Christmas time, but they released Wednesday past Halloweens' expiration date and so... this happened because my brain sparked with world building ideas.

I've been writing this in a straight solid 20 something hours now. Its five chapters, won't be much of a wait for them, and they're barely edited in all honesty, my apologies.

Slightly nervous 'cause its my own world, but I remember the unexpected love readers showed Run, so I've got some hope. It's not too plot or detail heavy, just something fun that had to come out.

Chapter 1

“You’re the most beat up cat I’ve ever seen,” Beth declares to the half dead, feral thing curled up on her porch swing.

The filthy, battered cat lifts its head from its paw and *meows* like it agrees. She sighs, at a loss. She moved into her cottage six months ago and the cat has been here from the day she unloaded her boxes. No one in the small community seems to have any idea where its come from, and her Werewolf neighbour Rick can only attest that the cats a male. His Mate Michonne suggested the cat was a stray Familiar. Always a sad case, watching the Familiars live on without their Paired.

Though Beth has to admit its not often seen in cats, as Witches and Warlocks rarely die before their time. Not like Werewolves who are always getting into fights over whose Alpha in the pack, or for their Mates. This cat is also known for getting into a lot of scraps, hence its ratty fur and limp. He favours his left paw but for as much as he stalks Beth’s porch, he darts off whenever she draws near. Sometimes she catches him prowling in her garden or curled up on her porch swing, but he won’t let her close enough to read his aura.

If she could, she might be able to diagnose him. She’s not much of a cat fan, mostly because everyone expects her to have one, being a Witch. Her preference is snakes, of which she owns two and of who feed her Magick better than cats, being the associated familiar of Lilith, who her Devine femininity is gifted from. The stalker cat has caught sight of her two snakes Nix and Knox previously, and though he hasn’t tried to attack them when they’ve been playing in the grass around her cottage, he’s been distinctly wary of them both.

Perhaps because they seem particularly interested in him, more so than they usually are with cats. Juggling her groceries, she gets her keys in hand and unlocks the front door.

“I’ll be out with your tuna in a minute.” She throws a look to the cat, who watches her intently, left ear slightly chewed compared to his right. “Unless your highness is gonna come in today?”

Swinging her front door open dramatically, she sweeps her hand towards the interior of the cottage, not expecting the cat to move at all. A squeak of disbelief escapes her as he gets to all four paws and stretches, arching his spine high before lightly leaping off the porch swing. Beth continues to watch him as he walks forward, stretching out as he does. He’s looking a little thinner than usual, though his limp seems to have improved.

“Are you *actually* gracin’ me with your presence *oh sacred one?*” Beth snickers.

The cat *meows* petulantly and rubs against the jamb of her front door, his filthy fur leaving streaks against her white paint.

Beth rolls her eyes. “You’re such a fleabag. Hurry up, or no tuna.”

Ceasing his showing off, he trotters into the house with a smug swish of his tail and Beth shuts the front door behind him. He follows her slowly, not hesitant but curious. The hall from the door is a straight shot to the kitchen, the living room off to her left, which she notices he stops to glance into. Nix is just slithering off her favourite arm chair to make her way to her brother and halts, giving him a sassy *hiss*. The cat gives her one back and then runs after Beth, leaping up onto her counter.

Wrinkling her nose, she sets her grocery bag down. "Bar stool, you filthy mutt."

Looking her in the eyes, the cat, covered in muddy streaks, dips his head and rolls all over her counter top, flakes of mud shedding off and littering her previously clean kitchen.

"Bastard." She whips her finger out at him and points. "You clearly wanna stay so behave!"

He sits up immediately, falling back on his haunches and twitching his ears inquisitively.

"Yeah, I said stay." She rolls her eyes again. "But only if you have a bath."

The cats' ears flatten and he strikes out his paw, hissing so that he shows both his sharp teeth and claws.

"Non-negotiable. *Especiallly* if you wanna sleep on the bed."

His ears spring back immediately and he re-sheaths his claws. Just then a knock on the square glass panes of her back door steals her attention, and she glances over to see her sister peering through at her shouting at a cat. She'll be packed off to the Institute if she's not careful.

Beth walks over to the back door and pulls it open. "Why you just can't use the front I'll never know."

Maggie sweeps in, her long skirts brushing the tiled kitchen floor. "The portal just opens here; I've told you this."

"*You* control the portal, I've told *you* this," Beth answers primly, heading back to her grocery bag.

"Oh, he came in!" Maggie coos, seeming to just notice the mangy stray on her bar stool. She reaches eager fingers out to him. "Lemme fix you up, little one."

Maggie adores cats and owns ten of her own in the cottages of Central Park, shared with her Coven. If her sister hadn't mastered portal use, something Beth still can't do, then she would struggle to see her only sister as often as she does. The cats' ears fold back, though he doesn't hiss, swipe out or bolt. Beth ticks her eyebrow up at him. Perhaps he can sense Maggie's utter adoration, and therefore her own reluctance.

"Have you checked his aura yet? What's his name?" Despite Beth opening her mouth to answer as she pulls his tuna free, her sister dismisses her and turns back to the cat, her palms glowing with soft yellow healing light. "What's your name little buddy?"

Rolling her eyes, Beth puts first her groceries away while Maggie reads through his aura with a frown, and then Beth plates up his tuna. The cat's attention is snagged on it and Beth has to admit her heart pangs at his ribs and spine standing out. She may not be the biggest fan of cats, but she's not cruel. She hates animal mistreatment, and sees it as repugnant, even adopting vegetarianism herself. Just because she doesn't want to see animals mistreated and dead however, doesn't mean she's overly eager to have them.

Her snakes are her babies, and they like their solitude as much as she does. They bond well, not just because they're her Familiars, but because they're easy. They hunt for themselves around her cottage and they only seek comfort from her when she's willing to give it. Ironically, she's often told by her mother she's as prickly as a cat.

"There we go, all fixed up." Maggie announces brightly.

Beth looks up from the plate of tuna and walks it over to the cat, placing it in front of him. He flicks his tail, diving into his food so that she can get a good look at him. The scrapes and cuts have disappeared from his body, but his fur is still horribly matted and filthy. Maggie always was better at healing live things than Beth, whose talents lie in home remedies. Bath oils, soaps and shampoos being her favourite to work with. Her hair and skin are positively radiant for it.

Her daddy has taken to calling her Rapunzel since she's mastered her shampoo, weaving golden health into the blonde and growing it down her waist. They both know Rapunzel's real story, in which she was a Deviant posing as a beautiful human, sourcing out rich princes, but they don't talk about that part of their histories.

"Did you sense anythin' 'bout him? Is he a lost Familiar? Is his Paired alive?"

"Actually." Maggie turns to face her sister with a smug smile. "He's just found her."

"Excuse me? I *have* Familiars."

"Ah." Maggie wiggles a finger, reminding Beth of her step mother, the woman her father divorced before marrying her own mother. "We can find up to four Familiars in own lifetime, Bethy. Surely you remember that from The Academy?"

Folding her arms over her chest, she refrains from rolling her eyes. "Yes, Maggie, I remember *first year* studies. But it's rare an' I'm not facin' a changin' point in my Magick to have sent out a physic blast."

Maggie rolls a shoulder. "You're about the age I was when I opened up my reality. It might be time for you to start Shiftin'."

Swallowing, she glances away. She *has* been having long, intense dreams that even Chamomile can't beat away. Her eyes instead flick to the cat. "So, he's come to guide me? Why would the Sources send me a cat of all things?"

"Cats are attuned to us Witches, Beth. Nix an' Knox are great for your Devine feminine channelin', an' therefore your healing remedies, but Shifting is for stronger creatures. He

does have nine lives for a reason.”

Glancing at the cat, who’s now cleaning his paws after devouring his plate of tuna, Beth grumbles under her breath. “I doubt that thing has anymore than three left. He’s a state.”

The cat pauses it’s licking and narrows its eyes at her, swishing his tail. God, they are so not gonna get along.

“That *thing*,” Maggie interjects, halting hers and her new Familiars glaring contest. “Needs a name.”

“He doesn’t have his own?”

Sensing an aura can usually help figure out what a Familiar has determined their name to be. Nix and Knox presented themselves, Beth didn’t have to choose for them.

Shrugging, Maggie leans in and presses a kiss to her cheek, talking as she does. “Somethin’ with a B is all I could get. He’s very walled off in there.”

“Prickly,” Beth corrects, briefly wrapping her hands around Maggie’s shoulder in a hug before she pulls away.

“Oh, like someone I know.”

Waving her off, Maggie steps out of the back door, pinching and twisting the air until a rip appears and her sister disappears through. Leaving her alone with her new, begrudging Familiar.

Crossing her arms, she turns her gaze back to him, finding him staring at her, and no longer cleaning. “You wanna be here?”

He hisses and Beth laughs. “Thought so.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I haven't watched TWD in years now, but I have seen some edits and info. Our boy was the last man standing after all. Kinda helped me stir up this kooky little fic. 🧑🏻

By the time she's wrangled the cat into the bath and back out, she's sporting a million new cuts from her shoulders all the way down to her hands. Beth scowls at him and he yowls right back, clearly as displeased as she is. Despite this, she's gentle with him as she briefly dries him with a towel, and then hovers her hands over his fur, encouraging warm air out of the palms and fingertips.

She combs her fingers through at the same time and she's surprised to see him relaxing, stretching out even. She's even more surprised to find that his fur is a dark, dense brown, not black. With all the filth washed out and in the low lighting of her bedside lamp, he almost looks chocolate. Beth smiles and tickles her fingers behind his ears, which he seems resolute not to purr at, but which makes his eyes drift shut for the first time in her presence.

"You just need some TLC, huh?"

His eyes don't spring open, but she feels the tension in his muscles over her folded legs, and drifts her fingers down his sides placatingly.

"I might not be overly fond of you, but I'll never hurt you, B. Never."

A purr does slip loose then and she smiles again, continuing to run her hands over him.

"That's what I'm gonna call you. B. You ain't ready to tell me your name yet, so I'll stick with what I got... so, I know Familiar cats are different to real cats. You'll only eat meat, right? Not cat food?"

B slowly opens his eyes and then closes them again, before opening once more to narrow into slits. She takes that as his *yes*.

"Got it. Well luckily, I grabbed tuna today, but I'll get your favourite. What is it? Beef? Turkey? Chicken? Ah, okay, chicken." She nods when he slow blinks at that one. "Come on then, you can sleep on the bed."

He climbs to his feet and stretches out before running and jumping on her bed, now fully dry. He resolutely stays at the end, immediately curling up where her feet will be. Guess he's not expecting cuddles, which she's happy for. She shrugs off her pyjamas and climbs into bed in her underwear. B keeps his head down and his eyes shut, though his ears dance atop his head like he's conscious of her undressing.

Beth climbs into her sheets and then reaches to turn out the lamp before lying down. “Night, B. Welcome to the family I suppose.”

There’s a tiny, sleepy *meow* and she huffs. Not even a purr. He’s so damn reserved. She kinda likes it, though she doesn’t appreciate the mirror he’s holding to her own nature. Within minutes, she’s drifting off. Her dreams as of late have been leaving her more tired upon waking than they should, and her body is achy as it relaxes into her mattress.

“Well,” Daryl grunts. “Ain’t quite what I had planned.”

Curled into his body and watching the slit of the trunk, Beth presses her lips together and shakes her head. “This ain’t the time for jokes.”

“Why?” He whispers back. “Don’t think we’re gettin’ outta this one, Beth.”

She can’t help but agree. The walkers outside are eager and vicious, nails scratching at the paint of the car and decayed fists heavy as they beat them. Through the slit that’s left, sheets of rain spill and thunder is a step ahead of lightening as it briefly brightens up the growing mass of legs.

A horde is gathering.

“We’re not gonna die,” she whisper-growls, trying to sound resolute. “We jus’ gotta stay quiet an’ ride it out.”

Daryl hums, his hand falling to her hip and Beth’s chest stutters.

“What’re you doin’?”

There’s quiet behind her and then his fingers curl over her hip with more pressure. “This might be all we got.”

She swallows. He’s giving up. He really thinks this is the end. Not wanting to take her eyes from the slither of open space, she blindly reaches back and squeezes his hand.

“We’re gonna do this, Daryl. We’re strong. We’re gonna make it.”

Beth’s eyes spring open and meet her own reflection, facing her mirrored wall. At the bottom of the bed, B is gone and her heart is racing. Was that Shifting? Did she Shift to another reality? She must have. She knew everything about that reality when she was there but now, she turns it over again. A world of the dead. On the run with one of her group members, a fellow survivor.

Split from the others. All alone. Only each other. She feels her heart pang at being pulled away. She cares about him so much. Fears him losing hope more than her own death. Being pulled back to this reality, she misses him. It’s one of the side effects of Shifting. They’re real people, somewhere in the Multiverse and her Other, the version of her that exists in that particular reality, she’s real too.

That's painful knowledge to live with. She curses her Shifting grandmother, her father's mother. Her powers as a rule skip a generation, falling only to Maggie so far, but now her too. It's a lottery at the best of times, but two out of three siblings are unusual. Beth and her family all thought it would end with Maggie, the strongest and oldest of the three of them.

She feels like there's something that's triggered her power coming to the light. Maybe it was moving into the cottage. She hasn't lived so close to other Beings in a while, the only reason she did so was to have quicker access to those who required her healing. She was hindering her own business living so far out and with it being innate, she was also hindering her Magick.

Sighing, Beth reaches into her bedside drawer and retrieves her journal, beginning to write out the details of her latest Shift, spending time to accurately describe Daryl's voice and the shape of his hand on her hip, each imprint of his fingers. Though she knew him in that reality, she never saw his face and, in this reality, she can't conjure it to mind. All she can make note of is the rough callouses on his palms and the low pitch gravel of his voice.

Just then, B swans into the room, looking much cleaner and healthier. Of course. Maggie patched him up, Beth bathed and fed him, but being with their Paired fulfils a Familiar, and they imbue their Paireds inner core. Luckily hers is healing, which is what is speeding his recovery. He almost looks cute now with his glossy dark brunette fur and crystal blue eyes.

"Why did you run away from me so much if you're my Familiar?" She asks him, putting away her journal and pen.

B sits on his haunches and then swipes a paw through the air without claws.

"What on Earth does that mean? You weren't sure whether to hurt me?" When she gets nothing, she adds, "you weren't sure about me in general?"

He slow blinks.

Beth gasps in outrage. "Well I'm still not particularly sure about you! Namely 'cause a Familiar doesn't tend to hold back from their Paired."

B jumps onto her bed and walks up beside her, though not on her. When he's at eye level, he *meows* loudly in her face.

"Oh, yeah, you cleared that *right* up, pal."

He *meows* again, slower like that makes any difference.

"You're a nuisance. You want me to list ideas?"

Blink.

Beth rolls her eyes. "Well... the most obvious is I ain't ready."

No blinking. Beth narrows her eyes and tries again. "I am ready?"

Blink.

“Because I've already been Shiftin', right?”

Blink.

She's glad she's been noting down each one of them now. Which, come to think of it, she did actually start when...

“The timin's the same! You turned up at the same time!”

Blink.

“So why'd you hang back? You know somethin' more, don't you?”

Blink.

“Do *I* have to learn this 'somethin' more'?”

Blink.

“In this reality or Shiftin'?”

He huffs a smelly, tuna laced breath in her face.

“Okay, okay, sorry! Shiftin'?”

Blink.

“... this reality? *Also*, a blink? So, both?” Beth groans and grips her head, brushing her fingers through her hair. “This is too much before coffee.”

Throwing the covers back on the side B isn't trapping, she slides out of bed and stands, stretching. When she looks at B, his head turns rapidly and stares at her headboard, taking very keen interest in it.

“Don't even think 'bout scratchin' it, B.” She walks around to her discarded pyjamas and slides them on. “Come on. Let's get some breakfast for you too so I can quiz you sum more.”

He yowls grudgingly and pounces off the bed, running ahead of her and down the stairs.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I'm having far too much fun writing a sassy cat and a grumbling woman who argues with him.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

It takes three days for Beth to work around B's lack of ability to talk and yet answer all of her questions. After several slow blinks and sassy slit eyes, she determines that B arrived at the same time as her Shifting, which lines up to her moving into her cottage six months ago. The ridiculous reason he didn't allow her close was because she has snakes and he's wary of them, and therefore her intentions.

Honestly.

The assumptions of working with snakes is archaic. He acts as if he should be the superior Familiar just because he's melded his Source into a cat. The warring Familiars can never seem to remember that they're both *Sources*, not animals, used only so they won't force Beings minds to break upon seeing their true image. Her mother always says Sources spend too much time on Earth. They're meant to return to their own dimension now and then, for health and replenishing, but they always become too attached.

Nix and Knox don't have that problem. They regularly disappear into thin air together, returning brighter in their distinctive black and red colours. Beth frowns as she caps the last of her herb, glass jars and neatly puts them back onto their assigned shelves. A row resulted between her and B about her snake Familiars this morning, and so B has slunk off into the yard, alternating between napping in a tree and swatting at the Pixie nest in there.

They seem to find him rather funny if the annoying peals of squeaky laughter have been anything to go by the last hour. Huffing, she closes up her cupboards and wipes down her sides. At least her orders are ready for Monday's batch. Now she can relax. Just as she's wondering where to take her unfinished novel, B strides through the back door. She left it open to air out the smell of her herbs, *not* for him, she tells herself.

He can climb through the window, since he wants to make glaringly obvious that he's a cat, and not a snake. Honestly how she had such an argument through hisses and tail flicks she'll never comprehend. It's only then she takes note that B is no longer his mixture of brown or black, depending on the lighting, but a new, pure snow white. Beth bursts out laughing at him, if only to dismiss how adorable he is with such complimenting blue eyes.

"Swiped one too many times, huh? Don't worry, ya'll return back to your drab brown in a few hours."

He preens, shaking his tail like a rattle snake against the door, and defiantly ignoring her jab.

Beth gapes. “Are you *sprayin’*? You little... no! I’m not jus’ gonna feed y’after that behaviour!”

He now stands by the pantry door, rubbing against it vigorously and demanding food.

Beth huffs an agitated breath, eyeing her door to confirm he didn’t actually mark it with fluids. When she asserts that he hasn’t, she begrudgingly walks over and opens the pantry door, to first retrieve and then plate his chicken.

“Only ‘cause you’re so damn skinny,” she reminds him as she places it on the floor in front of him.

He swishes his tail to dismiss her and Beth grabs her paperback from the counter. Leaving the kitchen, she heads out into the yard, which is now quiet. The Pixies have stopped giggling, clearly pissed. Should keep them quiet for an hour or two. Beth sighs happily and nestles into her rocking chair, gazing out at the sun-soaked grass. Her yard is so peaceful, surrounded by high trees that allow shafts of sunlight.

She thankfully fits into one such stream and her skin prickles with the gentle warmth. Plucking her bookmark free, she picks up in her novel where she left off. After some time, and several chapters, she thinks to get herself something to quench her building thirst. The thought slips lightly in her mind and the pages blur. Her eyelids sink under the heat and the book goes slightly loose in her grasp. Well, ten minutes won’t kill her.

She’s thirsty, it’ll wake her up soon enough.

Such beautiful gentle heat. Candles. So many candles. Their heat eases down into her bones. Her fingers fit to the piano keys perfectly like she’s been playing all her life, even though she hasn’t played in so long. Her voice feels rusty and out of tune, but the song is one of her favourites, something she wrote herself when she was young. It’s nostalgic to her, a dramatic thing she crafted in response to her first crush liking her best friend over her.

It makes her smile to herself as she sings. She never thought the world would be any different to that. Best friends stealing not-quite boyfriends, petty high school drama and silly things to cry over. She never thought she’d harden into something less naive.

“An’ pine for summer. An’ we’ll buy, beer to shotgun, an’ we’ll lay in the lawn, an’ we’ll be good.”

She plays the following notes to herself, until a clearing of the throat behind her makes her jump, and her fingers clang against the keys out of harmony, stressing a note into the air. She swivels on the bench seat and turns to face Daryl.

“Um, place is nailed up tight.” He makes his way into the room laying his crossbow out on the proffered chairs and rounds his way to the open, empty coffin she’s playing next to. “Only way in s’t through the front door.”

Beth nods, watching him. He lifts himself onto the edge of the casket and hovers a moment before falling back into it. A smile quirks at the corner of her mouth and she minutely shakes her head. She's not even surprised.

"What're you doin'?" She asks anyway, because she likes to see inside his mind when he lets her.

With a rasping sigh that makes her stomach flutter, he begins to lean back, swinging his legs in after him. "This's the comfiest bed I've had in years."

She tries not to laugh, but some of it coats her next word anyway. "Really?"

He straightens out his vest and gets himself comfy, looping his hands behind his head. "I ain't kiddin'."

Beth looks down at her knees, picking at the frayed parts of her jeans to avoid looking at him. Every time she does, she has to squash down how much she wants to join him, even if it is in a dead man's bed.

He clears his throat, rustling a little in his final adjustments. "Why don't you er-" Beth looks up at him and he seems to hesitate a moment. "Go ahead an' play sum more? Keep singin'."

With his arm behind his head and his blue eyes boring into hers, Beth's heart flutters madly in her chest. She bats it away.

"I thought my singin' annoyed you."

Once more he shuffles, half rising out before settling back and a hesitant smile decorates his mouth. Beth can't help feeling like he's shaking away his own nerves.

"They're ain't no jukebox so..."

For half a second they share a smile. A small, private smile that feels like the world narrows down to him, and his smiling mouth, and his shining eyes. Just him. Then Beth turns on the bench and lays her shaking fingers back on the piano keys, breathing deeply. She can feel his eyes on her back as she picks up her song and her thighs tingle, her palms sweaty. She hopes she'll muster up the courage to tell him she loves him before she dies.

Beth sits upright with a gasp, choking on tears. The sun has dipped low into the sky, evening not far off and a cold breeze sends goose bumps down her arms. She collects her book from the floor and hurries inside, shutting the door behind her and dashing past B where he's curled up on the bar stool, running up the stairs to her journal to write with shaking fingers.

She needs to write it all immediately, while the feelings sit in her chest. Daryl. Again. Whoever he is, he's now been in two different realities with her. She pauses. Are they different realities? No. She thinks they're different memories in one reality. The world full of dead. She wonders why she keeps Shifting there. She wonders why Daryl. Her lip quivers. God, she loves him. Her Other and her, just for the briefest moment, just while the Shift lingers on her.

She hurries back to her journal, before it slides away from her. When she's done, she sits against the side of her bed, still on the carpeted floor and takes a deep breath. Maggie always told her Shifting was hard. Beth always presumed it physically took its toll, not emotionally. Her fingers are still shaking when she presses them to her stomach, which even back in this reality flips every time she thinks of Daryl watching her from the coffin and asking her to sing.

She unceremoniously bursts into tears. She has no idea why she keeps Shifting to that reality, but worse is the sickening dread that swirls through her chest, telling her the reason is going to hurt. She's meant to learn something. Then maybe she'll leave that reality, once she's unlocked its mystery. The thought of going back and then having to return here isn't one she's fond of. The lingering love and dread clench her heart and force more tears out of her.

There's a hesitant *meow* and she looks up through her tears at B in her bedroom doorway.

He's returned to his dull brown and it forces a watery laugh out of her. "I'm fine, stop bein' nosy."

Yowling under his breath, he creeps closer to her, his eyes intent as they watch her and now increasingly familiar, even in a handful of days. He narrows them in a glare often enough, and lets his iris absord into sharp slits like Nix and Knox. Other times, mainly in the evening, they blow wide and almost relaxed, as he watches her wherever she goes. For being so hesitant, he's very needy.

His eyes are the things she sees in the dark, when she wakes from a Shift. He's always looking at her like he's waiting on her, like he'll only do what she does, go where she goes. She thinks by now she would recognise them anywhere, beautiful blue. Maybe she'll call him that from now on. She'll have to ask him.

She returns back to the current barb first. "What? You think I need fussin'? *I'm* not the cat in this situation."

He hisses as he walks, a quick flash of his teeth before he stops at her side and sits, staring at her for an awfully long moment.

Beth rolls her eyes and snuffles, swiping the heel of her hand over her nose. "You're hideous at bein' comfortin' y'know."

There's a small twitch in his facial muscles, agitating his whiskers before he very quickly, almost reluctantly butt's his head against her arm. Beth tamps down her smile and nudges her elbow back at him.

"Thanks, Cranky."

There's a light nip of his teeth and she jerks, immediately laughing. "Oh my God! Y'just *bit* me you savage!"

Blink.

Still laughing, she grabs him before he can run, ignoring his high pitch yowling. “Oh shut up, I’d have skinned y’already.” She squeezes him tightly to her, stuffing his head under her chin while all his legs stick out in defiance, refusing to fold into her. “Don’t you dare tell Maggie I hugged you. Or that I cried.”

Considering he doesn’t talk; she can feel B’s pregnant silence and then the slight relaxing of his muscles. He doesn’t curl into her but he stops fighting enough that she gets a decent three second cuddle. Then he pounces out of her grasp and shakes himself in a manner more reminiscent of a dog. Sighing, Beth shakes herself off too.

She’ll be fine.

She just needs to brush up on her knowledge of Shifting, first by heading to the town’s bookstore. Everyone knows Shifting in the first year is intense.

She’s just gotta ride it out.

Chapter End Notes

I'm also having far too much fun languishing in iconic Bethyl moments.

Sigh.

I miss them.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Another one 'cause- well, why not?

You may also note we've been bumped up to explicit with additional tags...

She rides it out.

Barely.

The Shifts hold onto her longer. The feelings linger. Her journal entries grow, more time and detail spent to the blue of Daryl's eyes and the way he makes her feel when he looks at her. Her Other has been in the funeral home with him the last couple times Beth's Shifted. They must be staying there a while, because Beth has Shifted there for two weeks. She's not really sure how time works between the realities.

Despite the numerous tombs piled up on her kitchen table, there seems to be no recorded answer she can find. She catches B reading them in the early mornings when she wakes for a glass of water, or a coffee. He's beginning to worry about her she thinks, in his own prickly way. She barely sleeps. When she does, she's with Daryl, and when she wakes, she thinks of him. Constantly. He plagues her mind.

Even for Shifting she doesn't think it's normal. She wishes she could ask Maggie, but she's scared that there's something broken enough in her to end up in the Institute. She doesn't want to spend her days with the broken Beings in there. She doesn't want to admit that maybe something is wrong. Her remedies are not coming out right. Her Magick is suffering. Her hair is losing its glow, and her skin too.

She stays home, kept sustained by the energy of her three Familiars. She'll grudgingly admit B's energy is her strongest source of rejuvenation. There may be something to the cat Familiar claims after all. He stays by her side a lot, sits and watches her when she cries, which is his own measure of comfort, she's learnt.

She's been awake for a while now, watching the darkness outside her window give way to the sun, reflecting off her mirrored wall and hurting her eyes. The discomfort isn't enough to energise her. She's still immobilised with her own dull pain. No, not *hers*, she has to remind herself. Her Other's. This is all Other Beth's. None of it belongs to her. None of it.

Not her world of dead, not her missing family, and not the worry of Maggie being alive.

Not Daryl.

Not the deep love carving a hole into her chest. She was with them in the funeral home again last night. She was writing a note out, a thank you to the people who may have been living in the home, whose supplies they helped themselves to.

“Maybe you don’t gotta leave that.”

Beth squeezes her eyes closed. He was asking her to stay. He was asking her to stay with him. She swallows the lump in her throat and throws herself on her back with a huff. Enough. That’s not her reality. It’s not. She needs to practice more. Stop letting the Shifting control her and choose somewhere to Shift herself. Somewhere else. Somewhere new.

Another version of herself to witness. Shifting can be exciting, it shouldn’t hurt like this. Taking deep breaths, she spreads herself into a star shape, recalling her studies. Something new. She chants it in her head, eyes closed. Somewhere new. Another version of me. Something different.

Beth giggles though it’s less humour and more outrage. “Daryl, no! We’re gonna get caught!”

Another giggle escapes her as he successfully pulls her around a tree wrapped in fairy lights.

“We won’t if you keep quiet, woman.”

Pressing her lips together, she tries to stifle them but she’s giddy at his behaviour and eager hands.

“You can’t jus’ drag me off an’ fuck me in the middle of my sisters weddin’!”

Daryl looks down at her, pulling her body against his and immediately slipping his hands up her dress, cupping her ass cheeks. “Not even a grope?”

She laughs, not even pretending to bat his hands away as she takes his jaw in her hand and kisses him.

Against his lips she mumbles, “y’best hurry before they cut the cake.”

“Oh yeah, couldn’t miss the damn cake,” he grumbles, his hands yanking her up onto the tips of her heels.

Squealing into his mouth, she giggles again and drops her hands to his belt buckle. “Stop foolin’ around an’ fuck me.”

He growls and twists them, forcing her to bend over a long, low branch. She gasps as the mood dramatically changes, her cheeks heating as she realises through the foliage, she can see Rick and Michonne chatting at their table. They’re so close. They could be caught any minute.

Her pussy throbs.

Daryl flips her dress up, pulling her panties to the side. Cool air brushes her burning cunt. She whines softly into her forearm, biting the flesh there. He buries his face in her shoulder, kissing and nipping her as his hands work at his belt, brushing her ass several times and heightening her excitement. Her heart thumps in her chest. His right-hand closes on her hip, and his left lines his cock up.

When he's in position, he takes her other hip and guides her back onto him. Like this, her pussy spreads over his cock head, allowing him to spear her open slowly. Beth bites her lip and trembles, nails digging into the bark. His hips meet her ass and she blows out a trembling breath. She's full and deliciously stretched. Her lower stomach feels heavy, her hips achy. She keeps her face buried in her forearm, muffling her panting breaths.

Her hair slides forward and covers her a touch more, but also moves aside for Daryl's mouth. His prickly, intent lips and chin brushes the delicate skin of her throat in a way that's nearly more erotic than him being buried between her thighs. His fingers dig into the flesh of her hips, forcing a squeak out of her. He drags his hips back, brushing against every nerve of her front wall and Beth loses her breath, expelling it with his quick, shallow thrust back inside her soaked cunt.

Biting down into her lip with all her might, she fucks her hips back. Daryl growls low in his chest and continues to yank her hips back as he thrusts forward, splitting her pussy over and over. Her bottom lip pops free from the capture of her teeth and she moans, low and desperate. Her clit is pounding for attention and her hand falls between her legs, soothing her ache. At a point the tips of her fingers brush the skin of his hot, damp cock slamming into her, and her stomach sharpens dramatically, wet depths clutching as he tries to pull free of her.

Beth's eyes fly open as something slithers over her left shoulder. She turns her head, finding Knox. He's looking very vibrant in her near dark room. Only one, weak shaft of sunlight has managed to pierce her curtains. She briefly wonders what time it is. Knox brushes against her cheek with his usual greeting, and Beth hovers her hand up for him to flick his tongue over her palm.

"Good mornin' to you too, though your timin' could use work," she grouses.

Even in this reality, her pussy is pulsing with its own heartbeat. Daryl was so thick inside her and her Other felt so achingly full. Knox slithers over her chest and Beth shudders, her skin overly sensitive. He slides onto her side table and down, showing off on the handles as he likes to do. She watches him all the way across the floor until he leaves the room.

She drops her head to her pillow and heaves a breath. Her body feels heavy and unsatisfied, her breasts more so. Her nipples are tight and sore as she remembers them against her dress, cut by the bark of the tree. Swallowing, she squeezes her breast and gasps. Her body is so tender. Her hand eagerly sides into her sleep shorts, where she's bare. Briefly her fingers play through her curls, but she rushes on, too eager.

Her fingertip immediately finds her clit, slipping in her juices. Beth gasps sharply and quickly moves her finger in rapid circles around it. She's unforgiving but wet enough to do so, and her spine arches with the dull heat growing steadily in her lower abdomen. Her legs

shake, a tremor running through her knee and then a spasm. She lets loose a desperately relieved sound, her orgasm blowing through her fast and unforgiving.

She allows herself to stay tense a moment, feeling every harsh roll of it before she collapses back into liquidation.

Sighing, she drifts off again.

“What made you change your mind?”

Beth’s heart is racing a mile a minute and the words somehow land tremor free. Her face feels tight and brittle, the desperation clawing at her skin.

Please love me. Please. Please, I love you so much.

When her eyes spring open, she immediately bursts into tears, curling up on her side and trying to suck in the agony. B comes running into her room the fastest she’s ever seen him, yowling madly. She can’t find it in her to be bewildered at his behaviour, the pain too crippling to put aside. She slides out of the bed unceremoniously and pretty dramatically, if she’s being honest, but she can’t seem to act rationally.

The grief and turmoil are ripping her open and she slides onto the floor, giving herself carpet burn. B is still yowling urgently, hitting higher notes as he turns in circles in front of her, as if looking for the thing that hurt her. Tears continue to pour down her face and sobs hurt her throat as they claw out. B gives another desperate yowl and then quickly bends down and rubs against her face, rubbing aggressively enough that she sneezes.

The sneeze halts the tears and she seems to be able to think a little more logically. She sneezes again and then spits out several hairs she feels lingering in her mouth, and on her lips.

“Jesus!” *Puh*. She sneezes again. “Of *course*, I’m allergic to you. Why wouldn’t I be?” She snuffles, drying her face with her jumper sleeves. “I’m renamin’ you,” she declares, seeking distraction from her shuddering. “Oh, don’t pout.”

He throws his head back, his version of *fuck off*.

“I wanna call you Blue, an’ now you have to let me ‘cause I’m allergic to you. An’ yes, it’s for your eyes.”

Blue’s ears flatten in displeasure. Pouting. Again.

Beth rolls her eyes and tips her head back, sighing softly. She stares at the ceiling as she muses. “That was so short, barely anythin’, but I felt so much.”

She presses her hand to chest as she asks, “what am I gonna do, Blue? This reality hurts so much. I don’t even wanna write it down.”

Glancing for his reaction, she finds him walking to her bedside. Write it down. She sighs again and reaches in for her journal and pen.

“You’re right,” she concedes. “It’ll fade if I don’t hurry.”

Though the lingering agony in her chest warns it may never fade.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Andddd it's out! Hope you enjoyed this lil thing, I certainly did!

“God, you taste so good.”

Beth can only grunt, lost in the heat of Daryl's mouth between her legs. She looks down and sees his head buried in her pussy, hitting her full force. She moans like a desperate, wild thing and grinds her face against him.

He stops and she nearly screams in frustration. “The kids are gonna be home soon. Best hurry.”

“Well get back then!” She keens shamelessly, dragging him back to her clit, which he immediately sucks.

“Oh God,” she calls, high and needy.

“My name. Say my name,” he mumbles between laps of his tongue.

“Daryl! God, Daryl, baby...”

“Good girl.” He slides his fingers inside her, stretching her with three until her back bends. “Such a good girl. Keep callin’ for me an’ ill let you cum all over me.”

“Daryl!” She screams.

Her orgasm grips her tight and yanks her upwards, her spine bending to encompass it. Her nails dig into his head, yanking at his hair. The groans rising from between her legs make her shake.

“Daryl!”

“Daryl!”

Beth jerks awake saying his name out loud and startles further out of bed as a sharp crack sounds in her bedroom. Her eyes swivel to the foot of her bed, finding Blue. He yowls at her, high, urgent and keening before another crack sounds and he splits into nothingness. The particles of him scramble, suck back into themselves and then Daryl lays at the foot of her bed, panting, staring at her, still crouched as Blue was, and entirely nude.

He gives a part embarrassed, part smug smirk. “Y’worked out my name.”

Beth's mouth flops open and then she conjures a fireball. It's draining to summon defensive Magick, so opposing to healing capabilities. A sweat breaks out on her forehead but she flexes her fingers and holds firm. Daryl has a matching one floating in his hand the instant she does.

"I'm your *Familiar*, you don't think I know what you're gonna conjure as you do?"

Tamping down her frustration, she closes her fist and extinguishes the fireball, just as he does.

"What the Hell have you done to my cat?"

Daryl rolls his eyes and laughs. "I've wanted to roll my eyes at y'so much. Swishin' my tail don't feel good 'nough."

"Stop it."

"I'm Blue, Beth. I told y'before, you gotta work somethin' out. You worked out my name."

"By total accident!" She cries indignantly. "I Shifted to-" He cocks his brow in intrigue and she immediately shuts up. "Never mind that! Why could Maggie only sense B?"

"My name's locked fro' me, the memory returned when y' said it aloud. She was sensin' *Bound*. As in *The Bound*."

Beth stares in astonishment and it all clicks. The Bound. A Being created by an imbalance in the natural order. A Star-Crossed Lover. One of his Others always with his Soulmate, until one reality where they didn't make it. The natural order slips and a Bound is born from the chasm. A healing remedy to correct the lost reality.

Another chance.

They're fairly common actually, but not common enough that she ever thought she'd be one half of a Star-Crossed Lovers pair.

"It's that reality isn't it, the one I keep Shiftin' to? They didn't end up together... we didn't."

He nods, hunching down to hide his nude lap. "I know all of 'em. All our realities. Every one, we make it. I lost you in that one." Agony paints his face.

Beth takes pity, handing him a pillow since she can't take his memory. "It's not like you ain't seen me undressed."

He grunts as if he's offended as he covers his lap. "I always look away."

Not sure how to answer this, Beth continues on, theorising through her unanswered questions out loud. "So, you're a Bound, we're Star Crossed... but why *now*? Why would the universe give me a Soulmate at nearly twenty-seven?"

“The realities timelines don’t match up, Beth. Y’Other died hell of a lot of our years ago, when we’s still being shaped by the Cosmos. It reshaped its closest reality: us. I’s born a Bound, locked in a damn cat, your Familiar, in the time you needed me. An’ you was born a Shiftin’ Witch, a generation gap precisely, who’d know of her Other, an’ the fall of natural order.”

His eyes. She knows those blue, blue eyes.

“But...”

There’s nothing else to say really and his eyes are strangling her throat, burrowing into hers.

“Need a minute?” He finally asks.

“Yes!” She squeaks, darting out of bed and ducking into the bathroom to hide.

She tips her head back against her bathroom door and screws her eyes shut. Fucking hell. What now? She misses her cat. God, he *is* her cat. She slumps to the floor, torn between warring loss and gain. She has a Soulmate. That’s nice, right? They’re Star-Crossed Lovers. That’s also nice... right? It’s not strange if a man just starts living with her because they already know each other intimately.

Her through Shifting and him through living with her in the form of a cat. Even by her standards, this may be weird. She wants to talk to Maggie. She was Head Witch at The Academy, always attentive to her studies. She’ll know something... right? Beth groans to herself and puts her head in her hands, taking deep breaths. They just need to talk. That’s all. It might be nice actually, to get an actual reply from him now.

Quicker.

She sucks in a breath. This is ridiculous. She’s hiding in her bathroom and for what? It’s Daryl. Also, Blue. But. She knows them, both of them. Now she just has to meld them. The sassy cat with the... hottest fuck she’s ever had in her life. Okay, she’s gone and weirded herself out. She jumps up before she spirals anymore and pulls her bathroom door open. Daryl’s not sat waiting for her.

She tries not to be disappointed. He never explicitly said he would stay... oh God, *will he stay?* Beth hurries out her room and down the stairs. She finds him in the kitchen. He’s dressed. Jeans, boots and a black t-shirt like he has an easily accessible wardrobe. He looks very much like his Other, with shoulder length hair, though his is much cleaner. Her eyes glance to his hands, which are preparing food and very clean.

No blood.

She shudders. "Where did you get clothes from?"

He continues chopping, not glancing away from his knife. “Reconfigured ‘em.”

Her lips twist, trying to soak up her jealousy. She’s always wanted to learn that Magick. It’s notoriously difficult to alter matter.

“With what?” She leans against the kitchen door jamb, trying to appear calm.

He briefly stops chopping to wave his hand towards the hall. “You got them old sheets in the cupboard.”

A weird feeling twists through her stomach at his familiarity, both of her home and moving around her kitchen cooking. She knows logically it’s because he’s been living here, prowling around all over the place when she’s reading and yowling to annoy her at that. Marrying the information with the man in front of her is a little trickier to keep a grasp of. She’s also realising he talks with his body a lot.

She wonders if that’s an adopted cat-ism. All her questions have dried up. Her reality feels ironically heavy. Instead, she just watches him, and he’s aware she does, she can tell. He doesn’t try to make a conversation. It reminds her of Blue, how he would sit and watch her, following her everywhere. So needy from so far away. She had a sense then that he would be whatever she needs.

“D-Daryl.” She only stumbles a little on his name.

There’s a flash of her bent spine and her knees clamping around his head. She swallows tightly, flushing. He looks at her and her stomach swoops.

“Are you... gonna stay?”

He stops what he’s doing and leans over her kitchen counter. Her heart kicks up. His eyes are so fucking intense.

“I’m a Bound. In this reality an’ the next, I’m bound to *you*. To make you happy, fyou to be happy, I’ll be whoever... whatever you need.”

She thinks her heart stops. She trembles where she stands.

“What if I don’t want you here?”

She has to ask it. There is a part of her that doesn’t. She’s struggling. She needs to know. His eyes darken and his jaw clenches. She has her answer.

Her eyes narrow. “*Anythin’* I need, my ass. S’long as you’re here, right?”

She’s not entirely apposed to him being around, if she has time, but to have no choice rankles her. Badly.

“S’not like I have a choice, Beth. I’ll- i’ll fall apart without you. You don’t know what it’s like. My goddamn *soul* is wrapped in you. I been alive years, livin’ without you, always knowing one day The Lock would come. That I’d forget my name an’ alter into whatever my Soulmate was seekin’, hunt for my lost piece, waitin’ to be released. I’ve been... *mindless* an’ now I’m here and I can’t. I can’t just *leave*.”

“So, is it even real?!” She screams, hurt. “Is it just some impulse threaded into your DNA, waitin’ to be activated? I don’t get t’ choose an’ you don’t either? *Screw that*.”

“Beth!” Daryl shouts as she turns away. “Don’t walk away from me!” His voice booms throughout her kitchen, reaching down the hall for her. “Don’t walk away from this.”

She ignores him, flicking her wrist and throwing her front door open with a gust of wind that brings in half a yard of leaves. She’s so mad she pinches and tears around her, determined to force portal Magick to work for once. It does and she steps through blindly, Daryl’s face in her mind. When she steps out, she raises her fist to knock on Maggie’s door, her intended destination.

Instead, she finds Daryl and drops her fist in surprise before she hits him upside the head. She frowns, glancing around and pressing her hand to a nearby wall. It goes straight through. Fuck. She didn’t portal to Maggie. She wasn’t thinking of Maggie when she stepped through. She was thinking of Daryl. She hasn’t portaled at all. She’s reality jumped. What goddamn reality has she gone and landed in now?

“I get it now.”

Wait. That’s *her* voice. Beth’s eyes widen and she looks past Daryl who was stealing her attention. He’s stood with Rick. Usually when she Shifts, she’s in her Others head, and she just knows things because it’s her memory to explore in that moment. They Others have spoken about Rick before, and a mental image has come to her Other, which allows Beth to identify him now.

They’re back with Rick? What happened? Has she missed them when she’s been to those other realities? Has their realities time kept moving? She’s so confused. She glances around. Carol. People she doesn’t know. Her eyes slide over Daryl’s face again. He looks beat down. Sad. Tired. Scared. So scared. Beth’s eyes go to her Other, sighting the back of her.

As she does, her breath seizes in her chest and she’s dragged forward, straight through bodies, by command of an unknown, silent wind.

She slams into her Other.

She buries the scissors into Dawn’s shoulder, Daryl’s presence at her back. She’s close to being back in his embrace. Minutes away from telling him she loves him, that in this life they can’t hold back. That they have to love each other in any and every moment they’re gifted. There’s a blast, a zing of hot pain through her head and that hot pain burns out, blazing a path through her body. Her mind is smashed to a million pieces, her atoms spread through the stars.

Beth wakes up screaming, burning and falling. Literally. A tear opens beneath her and she slams into her mattress through the ceiling. Her springs screech and her voice cuts out, her chest heaving. The rip in reality closes above her and her room is silent for the briefest of moments before her bedroom door ricochets against her wall, and her eyes fly to Daryl’s shadow falling over her bed.

She whimpers, tears steaming down her face and he hovers in the archway, his chest heaving as much as hers. She hasn’t spoken to him since their fight. How long ago was that?

“Your Other...?”

“Gone,” she chokes. “She’s gone.”

It hurts something awful. How can it not? Her Other is her, and she is her Other. She hopes she never has to experience an Others death again. Her Soul feels injured and gaping.

Beth takes in a deep, shaky breath and sits up. “How long was I gone?”

“Hours.” He bites the world out like it pains him. “I guessed what you’d done. Seen the portal. Only Shifters can rip into other realities, y’know.”

She nods. This doesn’t seem important. “Have- have y’seen it too? The end of my Other... end of me?”

He only hums, creeping into her room and sitting on the edge of her bed. She’s surprised that she feels a pang of loss for Blue, still here as he is. She misses talking to him, and his sass. Daryl doesn’t have a similar personality to Blue, only mannerisms. She wonders if she was always reading him wrong, and that makes her sad too. Right now, she’s swimming in loss.

“Beth... y’need some healin’... I can- I can help y’know.”

She licks her dry lips, deliberating. Physical touch between Star Crossed Lovers, its healing Magick is unprecedented and still vastly researched, but it is fact. She nods and Daryl doesn’t get off the bed and back on like she expects, but crawls on his hands and knees, as if forgetting for a moment he’s not a cat anymore. Beth smiles and lifts up so he can sit back against the headboard and wrap her in his arms.

Immediately her heart starts racing, her pulse hammering in both her wrists and throat. After ten inhale and exhales though, her body begins to calm and the most relaxing sense of peace washes over her. She doesn’t even tense when Daryl’s lip brush over her forehead.

“S’new,” he whispers, almost like he’s telling her a secret. “But I *was* made f’you, Beth. Choice don’t matter, ‘cause s’all I know. I can be whoever you need me to. I can change back into the damn cat f’ you want. But I can’t go. I ain’t. You’ll kill me.”

Shuddering, she pulls away to look at him in the light her open bedroom door lets in. “You can turn back to Blue?”

“F’that’s what you want. What you need. ‘Til you’re ready.”

Beth swallows, her fingers flexing in his shirt where she absentmindedly rested them in their initial hug. She thinks about her Other, and how she wasted time. She thinks about how much she’s missed Daryl every time she’s woken from her Shifts. Right now, what she truly needs, is the man beside her. The man she’s spent so much time with. Of course, that was his Other, and he won’t be exactly the same but his Source is innately there. She can feel him.

“I need y’hear right now. As Daryl.” She looks up at him, their chests pressed close. “Please.”

His arms squeeze her and his head bends to brush his lips over her hairline again. "Okay, girl."

Sighing with relief, she buries her face in his chest. "It's nice to finally meet you, Daryl. Don't think I said that yet."

He rumbles a laugh that warms her whole chest. "S' nice to see you 'gain, Beth."

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